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ABSTRACT

Adjunct professors are used widely to teach the great number of elementary composition courses for freshmen. Too often, they are underpaid, overworked, and undertrained. One sad result of this is that the experience for students in these classes varies from class to class as novice teachers cast about for a way of handling a writing curriculum with which they are not very familiar. Many times there are no departmental resources for training these instructors in current research and theory about the process of writing using invention, multiple drafting, peer collaboration, and teacher-assisted revision. To encourage teaching approaches informed by the most current theories, a one-day orientation practicum was organized, along with monthly workshops, and the writing of a short, concise handbook. The orientation day came into being because faculty volunteered to make presentations; some part-time instructors even made presentations; breakfast and lunch were offered to give adjunct faculty a sense that they were appreciated professionals. Articles and handouts were given to the participants so they would have a chance to look them over ahead of time. The monthly workshops grew out of the one-day orientation, and the handbook, in turn, grew out of the workshops. Its organization was geared toward the faculty who would be using it--it was a quick practical guide for experienced teachers as opposed to a how-to manual for beginners. (Contains 10 references.) (TB)

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ED 402 580

BUILDING A COMMUNITY DISCOURSE FOR A WRITING PROGRAM: CREATING A HANDBOOK AND A COMMON EXPERIENCE TEACHING PROGRAM FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY

Carol Price

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BUILDING A COMMUNITY DISCOURSE FOR A WRITING PROGRAM: CREATING A HANDBOOK AND A COMMON EXPERIENCE TEACHING PROGRAM FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY

By Carol Price

Something's rotten in Denmark, as Hamlet would say. Though most English departments boast, as mine does, "A distinguished faculty of scholars, writers, and researchers" that "prepares our English majors and minors for careers in fields as diverse as literature, creative writing, law, professional writing, public relations, and teaching on the secondary and university levels," that kind of hype doesn't apply to the first-year composition students or their teachers. The vast majority of students who visit the department for their two or three required semesters usually do not see those scholars, writers, and researchers as their teachers. Rather, these students are often subjected to a wide range of experiences with part-time teachers, also known as adjunct professors.

This corps of part-time instructors includes recent graduates, retired professors, and even community members such as lawyers, businessmen, even secretaries who happen to have graduate hours in English and a wish to pick up extra money, taking time off from their usual jobs to teach a writing class or two. Traditionally, adjunct professors, because they are part time and temporary, have had little chance to network with other teachers or to be trained by the department for their teaching, except for a general one- or two-day orientation before the school semester. Additionally, a general cutting back of funding for education at all levels is forcing many universities to shrink their teaching faculty budgets and while part-time

teachers end up instructing most of the freshman composition classes, they are not adequately prepared to do it. Those adjuncts staffing the writing classrooms get little hands-on training before having to dive in and produce. They are overworked, underpaid and undertrained (Greenberg, 1993; Myers, 1980; Witte and Faigley 1983; White, 1988.)

One sad result is that the experience for the students varies widely from class to class as novice teachers cast about for a way of handling a writing curriculum they are not very familiar with. Some students exit these courses feeling that they are well prepared writers and some do not. Although student skills do vary, the first-year composition students should have a similar enriching experience in writing class, no matter which teacher they got from the pool. When inexperienced or undertrained writing instructors are used, there should at least be a common curriculum, centered around the need to teach writing as a process to be encouraged rather than just as an end product to be edited and graded (Burke 1969; Elbow, Power 1973; Flower, 1985; Zoellner, 1983; Lindemann, 1987; Sommers 1992).

However, many times there are no departmental resources for training these instructors in current research and theory about the process of writing using invention, multiple drafting, peer collaboration, and teacher-assisted revision. The lack of teacher training in a theoretical base forces the adjunct writing instructors to improvise. Although usually the textbooks have been chosen before the adjunct is hired, syllabi and classroom planning is left to them. Syllabi for the same numbered course often vary widely, since most English departments feel that the adjunct instructor should be treated as

a professional and so do not dictate lesson plans or syllabi. That leaves the instructors at a loss for a common direction, winging it according to what each thinks is best. I myself had experienced the part-timer's dilemna. I remembered the isolating experience of being thrust unprepared into a classroom and being expected to somehow teach. I remember deciding not to require the expensive reader the department had chosen because the students were having to spend so much on three other books and I didn't see how I could utilize them all; but I certainly regretted that move because there were few useful readings or essay models in the three small texts I did use.

Seeing a need for my university to address this problem, I set out in conjunction with my Ph.D. internship head our English department's first-year writing program in the direction of a common experience for all students, through faculty development workshops and various kinds of training, including a teaching handbook. At that time our department was forced, due to budget limitations and a lack of graduate teaching assistants, to hire 36 to 44 part-time instructors each semester to teach most of its freshman composition courses--more than 90 full classrooms of 28 students each, in three levels of freshman English. However necessary, it is a nearly impossible undertaking for any English department to train all those the adjunct teachers, unless additional funds can be found to pay them to attend training. That was not a possibility, so another way had to be found.

A program so heavy with part-time, temporary faculty badly needed to focus on development of those teachers' skills and their pedagogical knowledge. I decided to try to embark on this drive toward an adequately

trained faculty and thus a unified experience for all first-year students. Obviously there were few guidelines or training systems in place for the ever-changing pool of teachers. Faculty development for adjuncts consisted of a few memos and one half day of orientation at the beginning of the fall semester. I decided that we needed to find a way to work toward a common experience in at least these ways: holding faculty development workshops, putting together a faculty handbook, hosting "Faculty Development Day" orientation training sessions at the beginning of each semester, and perhaps some mentoring for the newest of the part-timers. Other ideas such as a composition faculty newsletter and monthly faculty networking luncheons were possibilities also. These activities would help produce a more closely networked freshman English program and hopefully, give the teachers more self-confidence in their teaching.

A previous effort to achieve some training of the part-timers in our department was a ten-week English educators' seminar a few years earlier that the Department Chairman was able to arrange through a teacher-training grant, which offered a $600 stipend for interested part-time composition teachers. His 10-week seminar had discussed innovative teaching theories and practical applications; all the instructors were enriched by the knowledge gained and carried it back into their classes. Those meetings served as a helpful model for me to now use in planning orientation workshop and training meetings. (It was this seminar which originally inspired me to get more teacher training in a Ph.D. program.)

I knew that it was important to have the adjunct faculty getting

together for helpful seminars on current theory and applications of that theory. In order to get the instructors' input on what they'd like to see in the faculty handbook and the workshops, I distributed a survey (Appendix A) to get input on and ideas for topics the teachers thought would be helpful to them in faculty workshops, such as preparation of syllabi, planning class time, first day procedures, encouraging class discussion, textbook selections, grammar handouts that help, test construction, encouraging critical thinking, using scoring guides, and responding to student writing. The questionnaire also asked, "would you be able to give a workshop yourself? If so, on what topic?" There was enthusiastic response from the part-time faculty, who appreciated being asked about topics they would like to gain more knowledge about.

Since it was not possible to pay them for any extra hours of training, and it was not fair to expect the part-timers to volunteer their valuable time, the workshops began with the one-day fall orientation for teachers that they normally attended. Willing departmental resources were recruited. One of our master teachers offered to talk about incorporating rhetorically sound assignments; a part-time instructor who was also the coordinator of the city's public schools could tell about honing grammar instruction to miniworkshops. Another potential workshop-giver was an adjunct professor who had been the principal of a private school for years and knew how to motivate students. Other subjects such as the writing process, invention techniques, and ways of evaluating writing fairly and objectively were suggested. Several of the full time faculty became interested in the workshops and some of them even offered

to present one themselves. Hoping to encourage that spirit of cooperation I suggested that perhaps the experienced faculty could help train the part-timers and novice teachers who had no grounding in pedagogical theory. Some of the less experienced part-time teachers wanted to be helpful too, and offered their own workshops. The enthusiastic ideas had to be carefully screened to be sure the presentations would indeed help to encourage a common experience for students in adapting the writing process to make themselves better writers. Presenters were asked to turn in a synopsis of their workshop and handouts. In fact the questionnaire respondents, having been asked whether they cared to give a workshop themselves, mostly didn't volunteer, but a few did. So I thanked them and asking for more details about their presentations, suggesting they submit an outline-proposal for a one- or two-hour workshop they would like to present. I planned to offer a workshop on commenting versus correcting in response to student papers, recommending they focus on process rather than product as a way to encourage students' writings-in-progress.

To prepare for the one-day orientation, articles about teaching pedagogy were mailed out to the part-timers along with the announcement about the fall orientation and workshops. Nancy Sommers' "Responding to Student Writing" (1982) and Ruth Ann Blynt's "The Sticking Place: Another Look at Grades and Grading" (1992) prepared the attendees with a background of new ways to view evaluation of student work. Other handouts such as Boley's "Do's and Don'ts for Grading" and sample student papers were also used in the workshops. To further enrich the program, other university staff were also invited to the

orientation. The counseling center and wellness program, who schedule classroom presentations on student problems such as date rape, suicide, alcoholism and stress management, were asked to be presenters-many teachers do not take advantage of this resource even though the students badly need it. The reference librarian was invited to update the group on the ever-changing library computer resources, also important to the student writers.

On orientation day a breakfast was served, as well as a catered lunch, in order to encourage comraderie and cooperation on the part of the long-suffering, underpaid adjunct teachers. A user-friendly menu of four 90-minute workshop choices was offered for two different morning time periods (see Appendix B). Afternoon workshops would have been helpful as well, but our faculty were used to having a morning orientation only. Eventually a way to make them amenable to a longer and more complete orientation would have to be found, but it would have to be their wish, and not just additional work imposed upon them. They did seem to be very pleased with the morning workshops that had been presented.

After orientation there were the faculty development workshops to think about, as well as a teaching handbook. The workshops were an extension of the good ideas for faculty development offered by the adjunct faculty on the earlier questionnaire. Our workshop ideas had ignited a spark throughout the department. These workshops were to be hyped as being helpful monthly seminars (see Appendix C for sample workshop flyer), and upon hearing the plans for the semester workshops, the English department chairman decided to include the department's four full-time non-tenured instructors as workshop

presenters. They liked the idea. Thankfully, it seemed that almost everyone wanted to get in on the teacher networking and building toward teaching effectiveness. A snack was always served, and those teachers (full time and part time) who could spare the time welcomed the chance to get together, listen, and talk.

The handbook grew out of the faculty workshops; it was a way to preserve the good ideas we had been sharing with each other in the department's workshops and meetings. A plan for organizing the handbook format was necessary, and I looked at others to get ideas. One university had an extensive and comprehensive handbook to guide the graduate students who taught its first-year students. The Macmillan Guide for Teachers of Writing (Smith, 1991) was a great handbook in itself in an as-needs chronology, but I could not expect the adjunct teachers to read a complete book re-teaching them everything about conducting classroom and teaching writing as a process. Where teaching professionals rather than grad students are concerned, some having many years of experience, the handbook needs are quite different. Concise practical and theoretical information should be offered rather than a how-to for someone who had never taught before; our instructors already had their own styles of teaching and first-hand experience. Most important was to encourage these teachers toward a common curriculum by presenting new and useful theory and sharing information to help update those professionals who had not had the benefit of the most recent theory.

The tentative plan for the faculty handbook included the composition directors' usual 9-page (single-spaced) faculty guidelines memo explaining

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departmental rules that ordinarily is distributed every semester. Helpful articles on recent teaching theory would also be important, such as those by Nancy Sommers and Ruth Ann Blynt, and Boley's "Do's and Don'ts for Grading" distributed at orientation. I also felt that parts of Huff and Klines' "Using Peer Group Instruction to Teach Writing" would offer very practical instruction on using collaborative groups, an idea that was slow catching on because working with peer groups in the classroom is tricky. Some of The Macmillan Guide could be used, such as syllabus planning; troubleshooting with collaborative groups, encouraging invention, re-drafting, and revision, and so on. I decided to arrange items in an order helpful for encouraging the writing process, placing journal-writing ideas with other invention techniques, and creating essay assignments, and then diagnosing student problems, assessing abilities, peer collaboration, teacher-assisted revision, conferencing, and finally, evaluating.

The handbook needed to be updated each semester and so it was to be formulated as a binder with loose leaf pages. Keeping within 25 pages I tried to distill enough helpful information from the workshops and from other sources into the part-timers' handbook to assist instructors, especially new ones, to teach toward a common experience for all the first-year composition students. Prototype syllabi were a good idea as well for the teacher's handbook, especially if we wanted to work toward a common curriculum. Our university's freshman composition program comprises three levels: one course in developmental writing, one in college composition, and one in research and critical writing. It would certainly be a lot less confusing to part-time

instructors to have a model syllabus for each class they might be assigned to teach. I sketched out a common syllabus for the college composition class I was currently teaching and borrowed syllabi from experienced teachers of the other two classes.

To supplement the handbook I decided a newsletter for part-timers' was a good idea. It was another means for getting the teachers to network together, and the monthly newsletter page could be included in the handbook binder behind the "newsletters" label for future reference. But what to put in it? Acting as editor, I began to invite from the adjunct professors short topics such as ideas, advice, helpful assignments, or their solutions to problems we all faced, that they felt like sharing. The collaboration we shared in the newsletter about, syllabus building, mentoring, using peer groups, and conferencing would further the common experience goals for the English freshman composition program and enrich the evolving Handbook for Teaching Writing. As the community discourse in our writing program grew, a common experience in the writing process was becoming more of a reality every day. There is still a serious underfunding problem for teachers at this and most other universities, and exploiting part-timers is not the answer. But local attempts to enrich education for students can be a temporary fix at least.

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SURVEY OF NEEDS/INTERESTS

As part of my doctoral studies I am working with UTEP's Composition Committee to create a handbook that will be a helpful reference for part timers in our university's Freshman Composition Program. We would like your input on items listed below. Please take a few minutes to read the list and check which items you think would be helpful to include: (v+ very helpful, v good to include, v- not as important, or X not necessary). Please feel free to suggest more ideas at the end of the survey:

___Directory of helpful people to contact, including their areas of interest or expertise

___Resources for students: Study skills courses/Writing labs/ Counseling center/Tutorial services/Library orientations

___Advance preparation for the semester - course syllabi, etc.

___Preparing classroom presentations--allotting time segments

___First day classroom procedures: orientation, student placement, ice breakers

___Preparing for class meetings that retain student interest

___Presentation techniques: class discussions vs. lecturing

___Presentation technology: overhead projectors, audiovisual, etc.

___Using SOAP and other prewriting heuristics

___Creating rhetorically sound assignments

___Evaluating student writing

___Minimal marking--putting error to work

___Using the portfolio method

___Appendix of readings - articles with helpful ideas about teaching (please suggest one you know about! _____

_____

___ Other additions (please give us your suggestions)

_____

APPENDIX A

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 1994
8:00 A.M. - 2 P.M.
HUDSPETH HALL

Please save Saturday, January 15, 1994 from 8 a.m. through 2 p.m. for an exciting first of its kind offering! The Composition Committee is sponsoring a Faculty Development Workshop that will offer you a menu of concurrent sessions on composition pedagogy. You may choose among the following:

8:00 A.M. - 10:00 A.M.

Presentors:

Tommy Boley: "'I always find something positive to say': Evaluating Student Writing" **HUD 200**	**Carol Clark: "Helping Students Read as Writers"** **HUD 300**	**Etta Solnick: "Teaching: Learning One-on-One"** **HUD 100**	**Bob Esch: "Creating Syllabi and Assignments that Work"** **HUD 213**

10:00-10:30 Coffee Break

10:30 A.M. - 12:30 P.M.

Presentors:

Evelyn Posey: "Using Computers to Teach Writing" **LACIT**	**Lynda Del Valle: "'Cooperative Learning': A Euphemism?"** **HUD 300**	**Mary Louise Bardas: "Awakening Need and Desire: Techniques of Persuasion"** **HUD 200**	**Bob Esch: "Creating Syllabi and Assignments that Work"** **HUD 213**

12:45 P.M. - 2:00 P.M.: Catered Lunch by UTEP Food Services

Please detach and turn in to Diana Zink, Hudspeth 113 by January 12th

Name:_____

_____**Will be attending Faculty Development Workshop, January 15, 1994**
_____**Will attend lunch**
_____**Regular lunch**
_____**Vegetarian Lunch**
_____**Will not be attending the workshop** _____

ALL INSTRUCTORS OF COMPOSITION
(FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, AND TA'S)
are invited to take part in the

1st Teaching Effectiveness Afternoon Workshop

Wednesday, February 2, 1994
2:30 p.m.
Hudspeth 100

TOPIC

Effective Writing Assignments
A Share Fest

This first workshop will be set up like a "share fest." All participants are asked to bring to the workshop one or two writing assignments that have proved to be particularly effective.

Please type up the assignment, on a single page, if possible, providing information useful to another instructor:

- the criteria (page length, source requirements...)
- the objective of the assignment
- how you evaluate it
- which course the assignment is designed for
- any other useful info to help other teachers implement the assignment in their classes

Also, please make 15 photocopies of the assignment and bring them to the workshop. Assignments for 3110, 3111, and 3112 will all apply for this workshop, as they can be adapted to fit other courses. We will break up into small groups to share our assignments and discuss them, giving attention to what qualities make for an effective assignment.

Connie Wasem will be the coordinator for this workshop. If you have any questions about this workshop, please contact her (Hud 209, x6253).

We'll want to know ahead of time how many of you are planning to attend, so a sign-up sheet will be located on the front desk of the English office. Please add your name to that list before Feb. 2, so that we can get an idea of who all is coming.

We hope to see you all there!

APPENDIX C